

City of Riders

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News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Statement of the Sturgis City Council

The Sturgis City Council believes that the citizens are entitled to a factual response to Meade County State's Attorney Jesse Sondreal regarding allegations that the City improperly used public funds to influence an election. The City strongly denies these allegations and wishes to present the facts.

Mr. Sondreal has stated that unnamed citizens have filed a complaint about the City's Sturgis Information Publication Newsletter and that state law forbids governments from spending money to influence elections (statement to the Rapid City Journal on March 6). Under South Dakota Codified Law 12-27-20, the City is allowed to provide factual information for purposes of voter education. It did so through an article titled "*Annexation - Frequently Asked Questions*" in the City's Sturgis Information Publication Newsletter. These questions were developed based on common questions from voters at public hearings and the factual responses were prepared by the City Council and staff. There is nothing improper or illegal about responding to voter's questions, in fact, no response would be irresponsible.

Mr. Sondreal has raised the question of the legality of the City providing free 6 month trial memberships to the Community Center to encourage attendance and participation at the Future Sturgis Town Hall meeting on September 24, 2009. Mr. Sondreal stated to Keloland News: "if the city funded those actions, that's illegal". We respectfully disagree. Future Sturgis consists of six different citizen committee's involving over 60 residents that were formed to improve the quality of life in Sturgis. Future Sturgis is a grass roots collection of citizens open to participation by any resident. Future Sturgis is NOT a City organization and is certainly NOT controlled by the City Council. Annexation was one of many community topics presented and discussed by 250 participants. This Town Hall meeting was held three months BEFORE the referendum petition was submitted on December 14, 2009 to place the issue before the voters on the February 2, 2010 ballot. The City cannot influence an election in September that did not exist until December 14th. The City has never provided any funds to Future Sturgis for political activities and to suggest otherwise is professionally irresponsible.

It is clear from our view of the facts and the public record that the City of Sturgis has acted responsibly to educate the voters. We do not understand Mr. Sondreal's motivation in giving his public statement about an "ongoing investigation". This serves no law enforcement purpose. It only insults the honesty of Council members and degrades relations between the City Council and Meade County. These statements do not serve the public interest. No evidence of these baseless accusations exists and we request that Mr. Sondreal refrain from making any further statements implying that the City of Sturgis or the citizens of Future Sturgis have acted unlawfully.

The voters have spoken on the East Annexation Plan and we honor and respect their decision. The Council accomplished many positive goals to improve the quality of life in Sturgis such as continued reduction of the City property tax rate, the Community Center Rehabilitation Project, the Street Overlay Program and the Murray Streets, Water and Sewer Improvement Project.

We look forward to continuing to work together with our citizens for the betterment of Sturgis.